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**USDA EXTENDS SIGN-UP FOR 2008
CONSERVATION SECURITY PROGRAM**
CSP sign-up will run through May 30, 2008

WASHINGTON, May 7, 2008—U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Chief Arlen Lancaster today announced that producers in 51 eligible watersheds nationwide will have two additional weeks to apply for the Conservation Security Program (CSP) in fiscal year 2008. The sign-up now ends on May 30, 2008.

A sign-up extension announcement is scheduled to be published in the Federal Register on May 9, 2008. Originally, the CSP sign-up was scheduled to run from April 18-May 16, 2008.

"NRCS recognizes the inopportune timing of this year's sign-up and that farmers and ranchers are busy in their fields. We want to give them as much time as possible," Lancaster said. "We are extending the sign-up as much as possible to allow producers adequate time to gather natural resource information and complete the required self-assessment and applicant interview. This two-week extension represents the fullest accommodation we can make and deliver a program this year."

Natural disasters—such as excessive spring rains and flooding in certain parts of the country that caused delays in planting—also played a role in the decision to extend the sign-up, Lancaster said. As a result, many farmers and ranchers had little time to gather their records to meet the CSP sign-up requirements.

CSP, a voluntary program, encourages and rewards producers who practice outstanding stewardship on working agricultural land by offering financial incentives that increase with the level of conservation effort. Soil and water quality are the primary focus of this program; however, program goals also include improved wildlife habitat, air quality, and environmentally responsible energy production.

USDA-NRCS began CSP in fiscal year 2004. Currently, there are 331 enrolled watersheds covering nearly 248 million acres eligible for CSP nationwide. These numbers include the 51 watersheds in this fiscal year's sign-up and their acreage, which were first announced in September 2006.

For more information about CSP and eligibility requirements, please visit <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/csp>.

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